

Chapter Seven



Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval and Recruitment

- 1. Discuss how effective the state has been in meeting the requirement to establish and maintain standards for foster family homes, adoptive homes, and child care institutions in which children served by the agency are placed.**

I. Overview

CA has established a program to ensure that licensing and oversight standards for out-of-home care are regularly reviewed and consistently enforced. In 1996, a gubernatorial Executive Order directed a separation of licensing and placement services. The separation was established to eliminate the conflicting pressures of ensuring children's health and safety, and locating scarce placements for abused or neglected children. The Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) was created to license and investigate foster homes and other out-of-home placements. Licensing rules were revised to comply with the Adoptions Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA).

The State of Washington has successfully developed, through a process of community and stakeholder collaboration, revised standards for family foster homes, facilities and child placing agencies, including adoptions. DLR is responsible for enforcement of the standards within these facilities. General licensing standards are the same across all of these placement types. Specific requirements are in place for the individual categories, such as: foster homes, group homes, and agencies.

II. Program Description

There are numerous types of placement options for children who come into care. The placement options are monitored by DLR. Some of the types of placements include:

Foster Family Home

Family foster homes provide 24-hour care to children in the family setting. A relative may be licensed for foster care for the placement of kin. Foster home licensing standards are consistent regardless of whether the state or a contracted agency is approving the home for licensing.

Group care facility

A group care facility is an agency, other than a foster home, which operates for the care of a group of children on a 24-hour basis.

Staffed Residential Homes

Staffed residential homes are licensed homes providing 24-hour care for six or fewer children, or expectant mothers. The home may employ staff to assist with the care of the persons residing in the home. It may or may not be a family residence.

Overnight Youth Shelters

Overnight youth shelters provide overnight shelter to homeless or runaway youth.

Emergency Respite Centers

Emergency respite centers are agencies, commonly known as crisis nurseries, that provide emergency or crisis care for nondependent children to prevent abuse and neglect, for up to 72 hours.

Secure Crisis Residential Centers

Secure crisis residential centers are facilities designed and operated to prevent a youth from leaving without the permission of the staff. The facility may have locking doors, locking windows and/or secured perimeters.

Child placing agency

A child-placing agency certifies homes for the placement of children for care in a foster home or adoptive home. The agency may be contracted with the state to provide foster care for children who require intensive services.

Tribal placing agency

The state of Washington recognizes the authority of Indian tribes to license agencies, located within the boundaries of a federally recognized Indian reservation, to place or assist in the placement of children for foster care or adoption. (RCW 74.15.190)

III. Policy Information

Chapter 74.15 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) was created in 1967. This chapter of the RCW was designed to develop the licensing system, which included foster homes. Chapters 388-65, 388-67, and 388-69 Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) were developed for the regulation of Foster Homes and Day Care Homes, Maternity Homes, and Child Placing Agencies.

In 1969 licensing rules were developed specifically for the regulation of group homes. In 1978

a new chapter, 388-73 WAC, was created to combine all of the licensing standards for children's residential facilities. The former chapters were repealed. In 2001, as part of the Governor's Executive Order on Regulatory Reform, a review of all the licensing rules was completed and a new chapter adopted. The format of the chapter was changed to a *clear rule writing* question and answer format.

Washington law directs the department to review regulations and adopt appropriate changes at least every two years. The standards for facilities and child placing agencies were reviewed and revised in 2001 (Chapter 388-148 WAC). Department policy requires a review, every two years, to reflect changes in law or programmatic needs.

Licensing rules are formulated through a multidisciplinary, comprehensive stakeholder/community participation process that includes consideration of child health and safety, fire safety, staffing, and programming. Public hearings are held for final comment prior to adoption of new rules.

The Washington State legislature declared that the health, safety and well-being of children must be the paramount concern in determining whether to issue a license to an applicant, and whether to suspend or revoke a license or take other licensing action.

CA has comprehensive policies in place for the licensing of foster parents, and certification of adoptive homes.

Quality Assurance Measures for Maintaining Standards

State laws require that no less than 10% of all licensed homes have a monitoring inspection each calendar year. Foster homes are randomly selected for the annual 10% of monitoring by licensors. The selection process requires licensors to consider homes where there may be concerns about the quality of care. In addition, licensors are provided with a list of risk factors that they are asked to consider in identifying additional homes that may require increased monitoring.

In Fiscal Year 2003, the Division of Licensed Resources completed 710 health and safety inspections or 16% of licensed foster homes, exceeding the percent required by law. In addition, Children's Administration policy requires that 100% of licensed residential facilities are visited annually. In Fiscal Year 2002, this internal requirement was successfully met as well.

The monitoring visits include an interview with the foster parents, a discussion with the foster parent regarding any changes or updates they have regarding the licensing regulations, and a complete safety inspection of the home. If there are any licensing deficiencies noted during the visit, a Compliance Plan is completed with the foster parents to correct the problems. The monitoring visit may further include interviews of foster children who are at the home at the time of the visit.

Homes are also inspected by licensors, as a response to an allegation of licensing violations or allegations of child abuse and neglect. In addition to inspections by licensors, allegations of child abuse and neglect are investigated by the Division of Licensed Resources, Child Abuse and Neglect Section (DLR/CAN).

All programs are required to go through the process of re-licensing every three years. The re-licensing process reviews the provider's past three years of caring for children and determines if there are any significant changes since first licensing. All licensing requirements must be met before issuing a new three-year license.

In addition, the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) social workers are required to visit children in care every 90-days. Any health and safety concerns regarding the facility are reported to the licensing authorities for follow-up.

Measures are also in place for monitoring group care programs, which are contracted with the state. Per policy, each group home contracted by the department receives a quarterly on-site and program review. In addition, policy requires, at 2-year intervals, a comprehensive team review audits programmatic contract compliance as well as compliance with licensing standards. Although there are policies in place to guide the reviews, required reviews of group home resources are not conducted in a consistent manner.

Quarterly Reviews

Table 1. Total Number of Quarterly Reviews Completed for Facilities

Table 1 reflects the total number of facilities requiring a quarterly visit per region. As is evidenced by the table, there is a significant variance among regions in the average number of total facilities that had a quarterly visit. However, no region achieved 100%, and the state average was 35%.

REGION	Total number of Facilities that required a Quarterly Review	1 ST Quarter Average number of total facilities that had a quarterly review	2 nd Quarter Average number of total facilities that had a quarterly review	3 rd Quarter Average number of total facilities that had a quarterly review	4 th Quarter Average number of total facilities that had a quarterly review	Regional Yearly Average number of total facilities that had a quarterly review
1	36	18.5%	16%	6%	6%	12%
2	22	86%	77%	27%	18%	52%
3	19	79%	26%	37%	32%	44%
4	19	32%	32%	11%	21%	24%
5	11	0%	0%	0%	27%	07%
6	8	25%	88%	100%	63%	69%

(Source: Division of Licensed Resources)

Statewide Average 35%

Comprehensive Team Reviews

Table 2. Total Number of Comprehensive Reviews Completed in 2002

(Source: Division of Licensed Resources)

As reflected in Table 2, there is a variation in regional performance on the total number of comprehensive reviews completed. As a result, the statewide average is a 65% completion rate of

Region	Total Number of Programs Requiring a Comprehensive Review	Total Number of Comprehensive Reviews Completed in 2002	Average Number of Total Programs that had a Comprehensive Review Completed in 2002
1	4	4	100%
2	10	2	20%
3	12	2	17%
4	8	6	75%
5	4	3	75%
6	2	2	100%
Statewide Total	40	19	65% (<i>Statewide Average</i>)

comprehensive team reviews.

Licensing and Approval Requirements

The following are the key licensing and approval requirements for all foster homes, including kin licensed as foster parents:

Background clearance checks

Criminal background checks are required for all persons (except foster children) age 16 or older who may have unsupervised access to children in care. Criminal history and records of founded child abuse and/or neglect are reviewed by licensors to determine if the caregiver meets the qualifications.

Physical environment

An inspection of the safety, cleanliness and general adequacy of the premises is conducted by the licensors every three years. The inspection is conducted at initial licensing, and re-licensing, when there is a referral alleging a concern, or if the facility is selected for annual monitoring.

Caregiver qualifications

An evaluation is conducted of the character, suitability and competence of the person(s) applying for a license. This is done by the licensor at the initial licensing stage, and every three years during re-licensing.

Home Study

Each foster home is required to have a home study completed by the licensor. The home study includes an evaluation of the caregiver qualifications, in addition to a review of the criminal history and background clearances, reference checks, referral patterns, home inspection, and interviews by the licensor.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Training

Pre-service training is required for all foster parents prior to issuance of a license. In-service training is offered to licensed foster parents and focuses on skills to assist in caring for emotionally, mentally or physically handicapped children. Both training opportunities are also provided and/or offered to adoptive parents.

IV. Initiatives

Foster Parent Surveys

As discussed in Chapter Three: Quality Assurance, there are several surveys that have been developed specifically for foster parents. The surveys gather information on the licensing process, customer service, information and materials, satisfaction with services provided by licensing, and an exit survey to learn more about the reasons foster parents are choosing to discontinue providing foster care services.

Resources to Enhance Quality and Consistency

To assist DLR in the establishment of statewide consistency within the Office of Foster Care Licensing (OFCL), new tools and practice guides were recently developed. These include checklists for licensors, evaluation tools, and standard forms for waivers and administrative approvals. All forms have been placed on the computer share drive for statewide access.

New Standards for Licensing

CA adopted the revised licensing Washington Administrative Code (WAC) in September 2001. The new WAC was written in a question/answer format for easier reading. In addition, the information was divided into the main sections of foster homes, group homes, and child placing agencies. This process simplified access to the information.

Case Reviews

The case review unit is working with the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) to create a specialized tool that will allow reviewers to assess compliance with licensing requirements. The case review tool is in the process of development. The DLR case review toll will be implemented in 2004. An annual statewide review of DLR cases will be conducted.

V. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

CA has a strong legislative and policy framework and comprehensive standards for out-of-home placement of children. Several quality assurance activities are in place to assist in maintaining these standards. However, the quarterly reviews and comprehensive reviews of facilities are not completed on a timely basis. A statewide DLR case review program is underway. This program will provide an annual review of DLR licensing practice across all regions beginning in 2004.

Strengths

- A licensing practice guide for family home licensors is being developed to promote more consistent practice application of legislation and policies. The first draft is available and is in the review process.
- DLR is working with the Office of Staff Development and Training to redesign training for licensors to a competency-based model, and draft new curriculum. The new training curriculum is expected to be implemented in 2004.
- Statewide consensus-building meetings, with regional licensing staff, on the methods and procedures in the licensing of agencies and facilities, have improved practice and oversight of agencies and facilities. Licensed agencies receive improved technical training and consultation and licensing standards are consistently enforced statewide.

Challenges

- Required reviews of facilities are not conducted in a consistent or timely manner. A cross-divisional team developed recommendations for new procedures. The new procedure is being piloted and requires an analysis of the pilot site feedback.
- DLR exceeds the requirement to complete annual monitoring on 10% of licensed foster homes. However, at this time there is no process for reporting on the findings and trends resulting from these reviews.

2. **Citing any data available to the state, discuss how effective the state has been in meeting the state plan requirement to ensure that the state’s licensure standards are applied equally to all foster and adoptive homes and child care institutions that serve children in the state’s care and custody.**

I. Overview

Washington law and rules establish licensing and approval standards that are applied equally for all placement types in all communities of the state.

II. Program Description

The Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) was created to separate licensing and placement services, and to develop and maintain consistent standards. This creates a central point of contact and oversight for each of the six regions and ensures practice uniformity. The full revision of licensing rules in 2001 for all program areas required statewide staff and provider training on the new standards and decision-making protocols.

III. Policy Information

To ensure uniformity, all DLR licensing rules are developed in conjunction with and issued by the central office. DLR tools have now been centralized for all licensors and managers, and are stored on the shared drive for easy access. The centralization of the tools will help with consistency in practice throughout DLR.

Kinship care providers do not have to be licensed to care for a relative. However, DLR strives to expedite licenses for the placement of kin, within 60 days from the receipt of an application.

IV. Initiatives

Unified Home Study

A new Unified Home Study is being developed to simplify the evaluation process for families who want to become foster or adoptive parents.

Cross-Divisional Health and Safety Reviews

CA is piloting a new procedure for conducting team based comprehensive health and safety reviews of children in residential care. The team includes representation from Management Services Division, Division of Child and Family Services, and the Division of Licensed Resources. The pilot is testing a new review methodology that can meet the requirements of all divisions involved. Once the pilot has been completed statewide implementation will be considered.

Case Reviews

The case review unit is working with DLR to create a specialized case review process and tool to evaluate services within DLR. The DLR case review model will assess DLR compliance with all licensing requirements. Once the model has been developed and pilot tested annual case reviews of DLR cases across all regions and offices will be conducted. The DLR case review model is expected to be implemented statewide in 2004.

V. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

Since the creation of DLR, intensive efforts have focused on improving consistency in licensing practice. In 1997, each region conducted an internal audit of licensing records and practice to correct inconsistencies and infractions of standards. Each region has taken steps to strengthen quality assurance, including the hiring of first line DLR supervisor and requiring supervisors to conduct regular quality assurance reviews of case files.

Currently foster parents are provided a satisfaction survey card at the time of licensing and re-licensing. Foster home licensors also contact foster parents who are leaving the system to determine the reasons for closure of their license.

In fiscal year 2002, DLR conducted satisfaction surveys of foster parents. Postage-paid customer survey cards were provided to foster parents at initial licensing and at re-licensing. The surveys were designed to rank questions from 5 (highest score) to 0 (lowest score).

Strengths

- DLR has standardized and centralized all procedures, protocols, and tools. This has increased consistency in practice across the state.
- DLR is developing a comprehensive licensing practice guide for staff. The guide will provide staff with the necessary technical information to provide consistent application of the WAC and policy. The first draft has been developed and is in the review process.
- A cross-divisional team has developed a methodology for conducting comprehensive reviews of licensed and contracted group home facilities and residential care programs. The model will assess compliance to standards and certification requirements.
- CA is currently developing a new satisfaction system in collaboration with DLR, Quality Assurance and the FCIP. The new system will measure the satisfaction of licensed foster parents from the time of entry into the foster care system to the time they choose to not continue to as a foster parent. Surveys will be completed at the end of the pre-service training for prospective applicants, when the home study is completed and the application is either approved or withdrawn, and again at the time of exit from the foster care system. On an annual basis, foster parents will be surveyed to measure their satisfaction with both the child's

social worker and the licensor. (Refer to Chapter Three: Quality Assurance for additional information on these surveys).

Challenges

- The new Foster/Adopt Home Study has been piloted, and there have been concerns identified about the use of the home study, and workload impact, that need to be addressed prior to the release of the tool.
- There is not a current mechanism for providing trend reports regarding DLR services.
- DLR is exceeding the completion of the required 10% annual review of foster homes each year. However, data from the reviews is similar to the information obtained during the licensing process, and is not conducive to creating a trend analysis of the information learned during the review.

Promising Practice

The DLR comprehensive practice guide for licensing provides a risk assessment measurement to identify foster home that may require more frequent monitoring. Risk factors will aid in prioritizing the on-site monitoring of homes to better ensure the health and safety for children in care.

- 3. Citing any licensure or safety data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirements to conduct criminal background clearances on prospective foster and adoptive families, including those being licensed or approved by private agencies in the State. How does the State address safety considerations with respect to the staff of childcare institutions and foster and adoptive families (if the agency has opted not to conduct criminal background clearances on foster care and adoptive families)?**

I. Overview

Criminal background clearance checks are required on all persons age 16 or older who may have unsupervised access to children in care. This includes prospective foster and adoptive families, and those being licensed or approved by private agencies. Foster children are not required to submit to a criminal background clearance.

As required by the Washington State legislature, CA has completed background checks on foster and adoptive parents since the 1980s. In addition, the DLR has a system in place for ensuring that the criminal background clearance checks are done.

II. Program Description

State statute directs that any person (except for foster children) age 16 or older, who may have unsupervised access to children in care must submit a background clearance form to CA to have a criminal background clearance completed. DLR is responsible for evaluating the character, suitability and competence of persons having access to children. Criminal background checks are one way to accomplish this task.

A DSHS Background Check Central Unit (BCCU) was created in March 2000. This new unit has designed and developed a system that ensures background checks are conducted and processed consistently throughout the department. To improve the turnaround time, two new procedures have been implemented. A licensed private agency for either foster care or adoption services can now submit the clearance directly to the BCCU instead of routing the form through the local licensing office. This new procedure reduces the number of days in processing between offices. Local offices can fax the clearance to the BCCU for a faster response.

The BCCU has a direct link to the Washington State Patrol (WSP) database. If an applicant or person having unsupervised access to children has not resided within the state during the three-year period before being authorized to care for children, they are fingerprinted. The BCCU now conducts background inquiry checks for all department-licensed foster homes and facilities and private agency-licensed foster homes.

The applicant's conviction records and pending charges are evaluated by the Office of Foster Care Licensing (OFCL) to assess character and safety. OFCL uses regulations developed with

CA, as well as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), to determine what, if any, criminal history is allowed when approving an applicant for a license.

Quality Assurance Measures for the Completion of Background Checks

Licensors are required to document in the licensing record that there has been a background clearance completed on each applicant. In addition, supervisors review files to ensure compliance with licensing standards.

The foster home assessment and the adoptive home study must verify completion of background checks prior to authorizing care of children. To ensure background checks are completed for all persons in child care institutions (group homes), a list of staff and accompanying background checks must be processed prior to issuance of a license. The established standards related to background checks apply equally to all persons, whether they are seeking foster care, adoption or relative placement.

A minimum of 10% of foster homes are reviewed each year. The review includes a safety inspection of the premises, as well as an interview with the provider. The interview must include a discussion as to whether there were any changes or updates to members of the household, and whether or not they have had the necessary criminal background check.

Each regional office of DLR collects information regarding criminal background clearances. The reports include the names of individuals for whom criminal background clearances were required, the type of facility, and why the background clearance needed to be completed. In addition, regional supervisors track the dates in which the criminal background check requests were received in the local office, when they were sent to Headquarters, when they were sent to the FBI, and the total number of days it took to complete the process. DLR also gathers information on whether the background check was conducted for first license or a renewal. Each region forwards this information to DLR Headquarters monthly.

III. Policy Information

CA policy complies with the Adoption Safe Family Act (ASFA) by identifying a list of convictions for certain crimes that will permanently prohibit an individual from being licensed. In extraordinary circumstances an exception to the permanent disqualifying crimes may be approved by DLR if there is evidence of rehabilitation and the person is found to be of good character. The exception by waiver would require a change in the funding source of payment to the caregiver.

DLR provides a central point of decision making on approving or denying licensing where there is a question of criminal history. This ensures consistency statewide. CA has established a list of disqualifying crimes that includes convictions not on the ASFA list. The ASFA standards are a baseline of disqualifying convictions and CA has determined through policy that additional crimes are of concern regarding the character and suitability of child caregivers.

Policy has established a procedure for management approval of an applicant even though that applicant has a conviction of a disqualifying crime. When the applicant is able to produce evidence of rehabilitation, the department may assess the applicant is suitable to care for children despite a disqualifying conviction.

IV. Initiatives

Decision Making Matrix

DLR is developing a decision making matrix and practice guide for assessing background clearances. The matrix will outline the decision making process for assessing an applicant's suitability, as well as detailing the timelines for ensuring timely notification that an applicant or agency employee has criminal history. The matrix is currently in draft form, and is being utilized by licensors.

V. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

In 2001, focus groups of youth in out-of-home care between the ages of 15 and 19 were asked what CA could do to improve the foster care system. A common theme among responses was a request to loosen requirements for background checks, as it was difficult for them to tell friends that they could not come visit them unless the friends' families had been checked.

Foster parents have reported this concern in focus groups as well. As a response, in 2002, the department developed *Guidelines for Foster Child Activities*, which clearly outlines some situations in which a background clearance may not be necessary. This will help normalize foster children's relationships with friends and neighbors.

Strengths

- The development and implementation of the *Guidelines for Foster Child Activities*, which provides normalization guidelines for foster parents, and addresses the issue of needing a criminal background check when a foster child spends time with friends
- DLR is developing a comprehensive licensing practice guide for staff. The guide will provide staff with the necessary information to provide consistent application of the WAC and policy.
- CA has developed a list of disqualifying crimes, which exceed the ASFA standards.
- DLR has established a number of processes, which have been created to ensure that criminal background clearances are conducted according to the licensing standards.
- The BCCU has been developed, and assists the department in being more efficient in conducting criminal background clearances in a timely fashion.

Challenges

- Although there is a policy for waivers of criminal histories for license applicants, written procedure has not been finalized to guide licensors on how to conduct the assessments to determine if a waiver is or is not appropriate.
- If a potential provider has not resided in the state for at least three years, a FBI fingerprint check is required prior to licensure. FBI fingerprint checks normally take several months to complete. Statute permits a licensed agency to hire an employee and permit that employee to have unsupervised access to children prior to receiving a completed FBI clearance, for up to 120 days. The department does not share this decision with the licensed agency, therefore the licensed agency is fully responsible for making the decision to allow a new employee to work with children unsupervised pending, completion of an FBI clearance.

Promising Practice

COA Self-Study

The Council on Accreditation (COA) standards require that foster family homes and kinship homes meet the specialized needs of the children accepted for care. The department is required to establish and implement policies to conduct criminal record checks for all adults in the foster parent's and/or kinship caregiver's home, including the foster parents and kinship caregivers themselves. In addition to the criminal record check, the COA requires the department to check the child abuse registry for any information on the same individuals. For Washington, the Case and Management Information System (CAMIS) meets the requirements for the child abuse registry reviews. The Statewide Self-Study of compliance with COA standards shows that CA is currently passing in the area of conducting the appropriate criminal record checks. (*Refer to COA Standard S-21, and the completed Statewide Self-Study for additional information on Foster and Kinship Care Services*).

4. **Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families that represent the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed, including the effectiveness of the State’s official recruitment plan.**

I. Overview

The need for diverse placement options for children in care is recognized throughout all of Washington’s recruitment and retention strategies. Recruiting and retaining foster parents in an effort to provide quality care for the children in out-of-home care is an ongoing goal for CA. In addition to the FCIP, CA supports a variety of contracts with private agencies for the recruitment and retention of foster families that represent the ethnic and racial diversity of children in care.

A significant percentage of foster parents become permanent adoptive placements for children placed in their care. Generally, once they adopt they no longer provide foster care services. So ongoing recruitment of foster parents, and especially, diversity recruitment, is extremely important in achieving permanency for children.

II. Policy Information

Children's Administration, is required per RCW 74.13.031 to submit a report annually to the Governor and the legislature reporting on the agencies success in three primary areas:

1. Meeting the need for adoptive and foster home placements;
2. Reducing the foster parent turnover rate; and
3. Completing home studies for legally free children.

III. Program Description

CA continues to focus on diversity recruitment through regional recruitment plans and contracts. Currently each region develops a plan for recruitment efforts to meet the needs of the children in out-of-home care and the needs of the community.

Adoptive Home Recruitment

CA’s focus on adoption includes providing contracted services for specialized recruitment of adoptive families. These services include contracting with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) and the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE). Both the NWAE and the WARE provide photo-listing books of children waiting for permanent placements. The books are distributed throughout Washington State. The NWAE photo-listing book has an expanded distribution outside of the state.

In the search for an adoptive placement, a child's information is placed into the WARE book for 90 days. If after 90 days additional recruitment is needed, the information on the child is moved to NWAEE photo-listing book. In addition, some of the children are then placed on the NWAEE recruitment website (www.nwae.org). Funding limitations prevent all of the children from being placed on the website.

CA developed a specialized recruitment contract in Fiscal Year 2002, focusing on the placement of 40 children who had been waiting the longest for an adoptive home. The contract resulted in collaboration between NWAEE and seven private agencies that provide specialized recruitment for identified children on a fee for service basis. By the end of the first year, 26 out of the 40 children had been placed into identified permanent homes, with several placements pending. Six of the original 40 children identified were removed from the program after determining that adoption was not the most appropriate plan, or the child did not meet the program requirements.

Adoption Consortiums

Each region continues to convene adoption consortiums. These consortiums provide a collaborative staffing process between CA and private agencies to increase awareness of children in need of adoptive families and approved adoptive families waiting for placements. Consortiums promote inter-regional linkages on behalf of children and have resulted in an increase in the number of children registered with the adoption exchanges.

Purchase of Service

CA increased the Purchase of Service (POS) budget for Fiscal Year 2002. This arrangement provides private agencies in and out of state with financial assistance to offset the actual costs for the recruitment, placement, and finalization of a child into an adoptive home. This funding is essential in the placement of children that might not otherwise be able to be placed due to fees that an agency may charge for the placement of children. During Fiscal Year 2002, there were over 40 requests for POS fees made, resulting in 18 contracts. Eleven of these contracts are with agencies in other states.

Foster Home Recruitment

CA has partnered with the Casey Family Programs for the development of the Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP). The plan sets the stage for a public/private commitment to create a system that will be responsive to foster parents and kinship caregivers. The plan further emphasizes using data to target retention and recruitment efforts, evaluate strategies for change, and guide continuous improvement to better meet the needs of the children it serves.

The role of Casey Family Programs to collaborate with CA on the FCIP has recently changed, due to budgetary issues. However, Casey Family Programs will continue to focus their efforts on a kinship project in the Region 4 office.

The detailed FCIP addresses the following broad areas:

- Provide plan oversight and coordination;
- Change agency culture;
- Increase foster home retention, recruitment and diversity;
- Enhance community partnerships and outreach; and
- Increase supports for foster care.

Each region develops its own recruitment efforts to meet the needs of the children in out-of-home care. Regional contracts build upon the statewide efforts to recruit and retain foster homes. Typical of these contracts is one in Region 6 with the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency (SPIPA) Foundation, which represents five federally recognized Tribes in the region for recruitment of Native American homes. A similar contract in Region 4 enlists the help of the United Indians of All Tribes, and one in Region 2 involves the Yakama Nation. In addition, Region 3 has a quarterly contract with One Church One Child/UJIMA to target recruitment of homes for African-American children, and a fee-for-service contract with Lutheran Community Services to target the recruitment of Hispanic homes.

Children's Administration also contracts with Families for Kids Recruitment Resources for generalized recruitment, and for recruitment of foster homes in the three specific populations of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

Utilizing a portion of the recruitment budget set aside in the 2002 legislative session, CA divided the money among the 29 Tribes and Tribal Organizations to provide recruitment of Native American foster homes. A goal was set to increase the number of Tribal foster homes by 10% by the end of fiscal year 2003. In addition to the statewide contracts with Tribes and Tribal Organizations, regional contracts build upon the recruitment and retention of Tribal foster homes. The goal to increase the number of Tribal foster homes by 10% was met with a total number of 338 Tribal foster homes as of May 2003.

Foster Home Retention

A variety of activities are being done to increase the retention of foster parents. A subcommittee of the Foster Care Improvement Plan developed a plan to support foster parents by developing a system of "hubs" or "buddies." A hub would have a center family coordinating the connections with other families who are part of the hub. They would support each other, exchanging ideas, resources and perhaps respite care. This would be foster parent to foster parent support. In a buddy system a veteran foster parent or foster family is paired with a new foster parent or foster family with the same goal of support. This plan is currently under review by the CA Management Team and foster care partners.

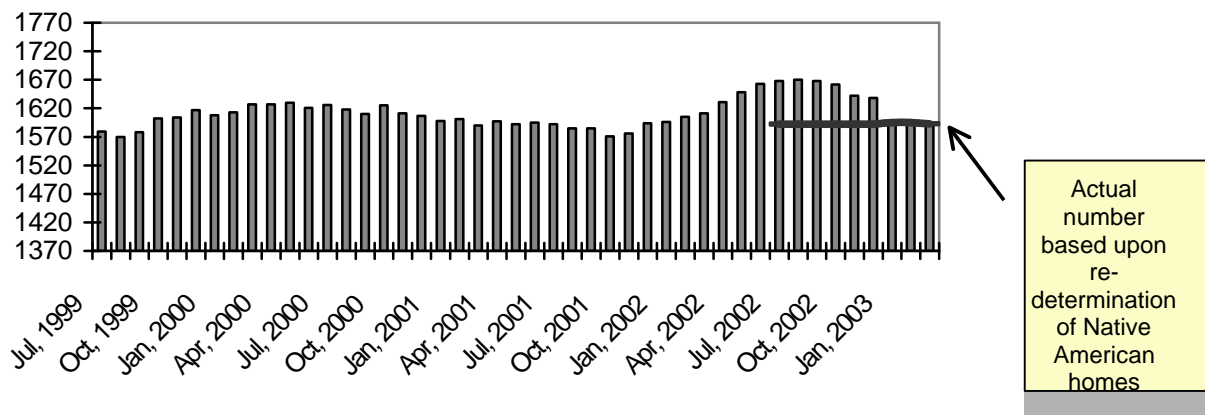
The agency also is working to change the culture to improve relationships between foster parents and staff members. A subcommittee of the Foster Care Improvement Plan is working on a Casey Family Programs national collaborative to test small changes quickly in a pilot area, then

spread them across the state. Much of that work focuses on ideas to change the culture. The Project Management Team of the Foster Care Improvement plan is writing a foster parent handbook, a user-friendly guide to the day-to-day task of foster parenting. Another team is identifying the rules and regulations that affect the interaction between foster parents and agency staff. A 2 ½-day training of high-level CA management focused on inclusion of foster parents in working with the agency as a way of increasing foster parent satisfaction. A comprehensive system of surveying is being pilot tested in summer 2003 to measure foster parent satisfaction from they start through the licensing process to the time they exit the system.

Data Trends

Availability of Minority Foster Homes

Chart 1. Number of Minority Foster Homes Available for Out-of-Home Care



(Source: Children's Administration Data Integration and Distribution Unit)

Chart 1 reflects the increase in the availability of minority foster homes throughout the state from 1999 to 2003. In viewing the chart, it would appear that in November 2002, CA experienced a decline in the number of minority homes available. This, however, was not a decline, but a recalculation of current numbers. The variation is related to data issues as well as a reclassification of some Native American foster homes. Previously, homes could be considered Native American on the basis of self report. New regulations require that Native American foster homes may only be certified as such if at least one parent can demonstrate proof of tribal enrollment. With these new regulations, and reclassification, a new minority foster home count was determined. CA continues to work with communities on regional basis to recruit more homes to meet the need of children in placement.

IV. Initiatives

Breakthrough Series Collaborative

The state is participating in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, a nationwide effort for improved ways to recruit and retain foster parents. Casey Family Services is partnering with the state in this innovative new model. Among state goals of the collaboration are to increase the number of Latino homes, keep more siblings together and increase the overall number of homes by better support services for the foster families.

Specialized Recruitment

The state developed a specialized recruitment contract in fiscal year 2002 focusing on the placement of 40 children who had been waiting the longest for an adoptive home. By the end of the first year, 26 children have been placed into identified permanent homes. Six of the original 40 children identified were removed from the program after determining that adoption was not the most appropriate plan.

V. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

The recruitment and retention of providers that represent the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State occurs in a variety of ways. In addition to recruitment and retention efforts by the CA, for both foster and adoptive placements, much of the diversity recruitment efforts are completed by agencies contracted to conduct the recruitment. However, current data suggests that recruitment of sufficient minority placement resources remains a major need.

The FCIP is a progressive and comprehensive strategy to recruit and retain foster parents. However, implementation of the plan remains slow, and the benefits yet to be realized.

Strengths

- CA has developed and contracted with a various organizations/agencies for a variety of creative strategies to recruit minority foster and adoption resources. These strategies have demonstrated some success.
- CA has approximately 1,600 licensed minority foster homes. This represents close to 25% of all licensed foster homes.

Challenges

- CA does not have a system in place to track the ethnic and/or race of recruited adoptive applicants.

Promising Practice

COA Self-Study

The Council on Accreditation (COA) standards require the organization, when possible, place children in an environment that supports their cultural identity and linguistic needs. According to the Statewide Self-Study, Children's Administration is passing this standard. (*Refer to S-21 for additional information*).

5. **Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to recruit and use adoptive families for waiting children across State or other jurisdictional boundaries. In responding, consider relevant agency policies, time frames for initiating recruitment activities, and specific methods.**

I. Overview

CA works to locate permanent placement for waiting children in a variety of ways, including cross-state recruitment and through the development of specialized contracts.

II. Program and Policy Information

Cross Jurisdictional Resources

CA continues to work with the Independent Adoption Center and Team Work for Children to remove barriers to placements. An agreement targeting collaboration among border communities between Washington, Oregon and Team Work for Children is under design. Authority to enter into border state agreements is granted under the Interstate Compact for Placement (ICPC).

The purpose of a border state agreement is to improve the ability of a state to make a timely placement of a child into another state by reducing the amount of time to complete the necessary home evaluation and removing barriers to timely placements with appropriate relatives.

Adoption Recruitment

The Children's Administration's focus on adoption includes providing contract services for specialized recruitment of children. These services include contracting with the Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE) that provides recruitment services through photolisting books for NWAE and the Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE). Both photolisting books are distributed throughout Washington and the NWAE book has an expanded distribution outside of the state. A child moves to the NWAE photolisting book after a child has been in the WARE book for 90 days, signifying that additional recruitment is needed. Some of the children are then placed on the NWAE recruitment website (www.nwae.org). Funding limits the number of children Washington places on the website.

CA developed a specialized recruitment contract in fiscal year 2002 focusing on the placement of 40 children who had been waiting the longest for an adoptive home. The contract resulted in collaboration between NWAE and seven private agencies that provide specialized recruitment for identified children on a fee-for-service basis. By the end of the first year, 26 children have been placed into identified permanent homes, with several placements pending. Six of the original 40 children identified were removed from the program after determining that adoption was not the most appropriate plan, the child did not meet the program requirements, or the social worker decided to withdraw the child from the project. Decisions for withdrawal from the

project varied from not wanting to cooperate with the private agencies to not wanting to have a child moved out of the county or state.

Adoption Consortiums

Each region continues to convene adoption consortiums. The consortiums provide a collaborative staffing process between the department and private agencies. The goal of the consortiums is to increase awareness of children in need of adoptive families and approved adoptive families waiting for placements. Consortiums promote inter-regional linkages on behalf of children and have resulted in an increase in the number of children registered with the adoption exchanges.

Purchase of Service

The Children's Administration increased the Purchase of Service (POS) budget for FY 2002. This contract provides private agencies in and out of state with financial assistance to offset the actual costs for the recruitment, placement, and finalization of a child into an adoptive home. This funding is essential in the placement of children that might not otherwise be able to be placed due to fees that an agency may charge for the placement of children. During FY 2002, there were over 40 requests for POS fees made, resulting in 18 contracts. Eleven of these contracts are with agencies in other states.

III. Initiatives

Family Home Study

During this past fiscal year, CA staff has worked on the continuous quality improvement project for developing a consistent format for completing home studies for foster parents, adoptive parents, and relative caregivers. The new forms and format have been piloted in seven offices around the state for six months. The results of the pilot are pending at this time.

Specialized Adoption Training

Plans have been developed to provide specialized adoption training through the CA Training Academy. Competency based curriculum is currently in the process of development and is scheduled for implementation in 2004.

III. Lessons Learned During the Statewide Assessment

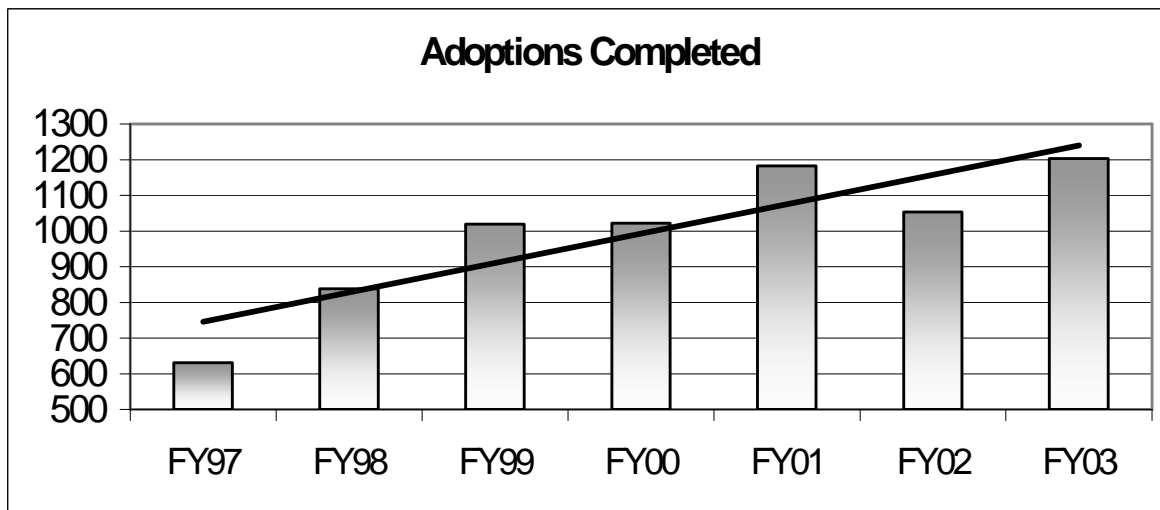
Many factors may have affected the total number of adoptions finalized in Washington during FY 2002. Significantly, the affects of September 11, 2001, touched the lives all people in the United States and around the world. The Northwest Adoption Exchange, a provider contracted with Children's Administration (CA), reported a decrease in the number of hits to the website and the number of phone calls from families inquiring about adoption compared to the same time period for the previous year.

Other barriers may include the federal tax credit that goes into effect January 1, 2003. The new tax credit increases to \$10,000 per adoption after January 1, 2003. Field staff across the state have reported that families have been advised through their legal counsel to wait to finalize their adoptions until after January 1, 2003.

Some social workers in the field have reported that they are running into barriers to completing adoptions in their regions. Some of the barriers include the court systems being full, adoption hearings being limited to a certain number of cases per month, and some families needing additional support services prior to finalization of the adoption. CA plans to continue focusing on the finalization of adoption for children with an identified plan of adoption.

While the number of adoptions has increased in recent years. As reflected in Chart 1, 1,203 children were adopted in FY 2003, exceeding the target of 1,200 total adoptions for the fiscal year with 1,100 of those adoptions finalized and documented by July 2003. This increase occurred despite federal tax incentives which became effective January 1, 2003, resulting in the postponement of many adoptions during the first two quarters of the fiscal year.

Chart 1. Adoptions Completed from FY 1997 to FY 2003



(Source: Children's Administration , Program and Fiscal Review, September 2003)

Washington received \$358,000 in federal adoption incentive funding for finalized adoptions during FY 200, under the Adoption Incentive Program. These funds were allocated to the regions to support their continued adoption efforts.

Strengths

- The number of children adopted annually has increased.
- CA has developed a specialized recruitment contract focusing on the placement of 40 children who had been waiting the longest for an adoptive home. By the end of the first year, 26 children had been placed into identified permanent homes, with several placements pending.
- Washington received \$858,419 in adoption incentive funding for finalized adoptions during FFY 2001, under the Adoption Incentive Payment Program. Each region was allocated resources and has established a plan to complete adoptions.
- Plans have been developed to provide specialized adoption training through the CA Training Academy. Competency based curriculum is currently in the process of development.

Challenges

- According to the Families For Kids Partnership Permanency Report, 2002, the number of legally free children in placement has increased. Recruitment of adoptive homes and timely completion of adoption plans for these children presents an ongoing challenge.

Promising Practice

COA Self-Study

The Council on Accreditation (COA) standards require that the organization assume responsibility for placing a child with special needs, and uses concentrated efforts to conduct and stabilize the placement. The organization conducts intensive recruitment of adoptive parents, utilizes the adoption resource exchange, or subsidized adoption, as appropriate. The Statewide Self-Study for Children's Administration shows that the organization is currently passing in this area. (Refer to Chapter S-14, Adoption Services, of the COA Standards).